DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 588 HE 017 287

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TITLE Professional Role Conception on Generic versus RN Students.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 12p.; Doctoral Dissertation, University of Minnesota.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Doctoral Dissertations (041) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bachelors Degrees; Comparative Analysis; Higher Education; *Nurses; *Nursing Education; *Role Perception; Socialization; Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

Nursing role conceptions of registered nursing (RN) students were compared with those of generic students in the baccalaureate program at South Dakota State University. The study population consisted of 76 students. Responses were obtained from four groups of students using a quasi-experimental pretest/posttest group design. Factors positively or negatively affecting professional role conception were isolated. Analysis showed that younger, unmarried, full-time generic students achieved highest professional role conception scores, while older RN students achieved highest bureaucratic role conception scores. Although RNs with 2 to 5 years nursing experience scored highest on the bureaucratic scale, cumulative nursing experience beyond 5 years did not increase bureaucratic loyalties. Professional role conception increased slightly with continuous enrollment in nursing courses. The results suggest that professional role values should be continually reinforced throughout the curriculum to counteract bureaucratic role conceptions acquired by RNs in work settings and stereotypical service role conceptions held by generic nursing students. (Author/SW)

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ED245588

PROFESSIONAL ROLE CONCEPTION OF GENERIC VERSUS RN STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

In this study, nursing role conceptions of RN Students were compared with those of Generic Students enrolled in the baccalaureate program at South Dakota State University. Factors positively or negatively affecting professional role conception were isolated. Analysis showed that younger, unmarried, full-time Generic Students achieved the highest professional role conceptions; while older RN Students achieved the highest bureaucratic role conceptions. Although RN's with two to five years of experience scored highest on the bureaucratic scale, cumulative nursing experience beyond five years did not increase bureaucratic loyalties. Professional role conception increased slightly with continuous enrollment in nursing courses. The results of this study suggest that professional role values should be continually reinforced throughout the curriculum to counteract bureaucratic role conceptions acquired by RN's in the work setting and stereotypical service role conceptions held by Generic Students.

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The Problem

With the resolution of the Entry Into Practice issue pending, RN's will be entering baccalaureate program in unprecedented numbers. Even today, RN's constitute a significant population within baccalaureate

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schools of nursing. The NLN reported 33,357 RN's were enrolled in baccalaureate programs in the U.S. during the 1980-81 academic year. RN Student Graduates in the U.S. during that time approached 8500. This represents a 14.3% increase over the previous year and a 60.7% increase over the previous four years. These RN Students are faced with role assessment, role conflict and role re-orientation. In addition, they maintain multiple external roles as employees, spouses, parents and community leaders.

A review of the literature revealed a great deal of research in the development of nursing role conceptions among Generic Students. Very few studies were found exploring changes in role conception of RN Students during transition to baccalaureate graduates. Further investigation of role re-orientation of RN Students is paramount if nursing education is to respond to their learning needs in terms that will facilitate their optimal professional development.

The setting for this study was the Baccalaureate Nursing Program at South Dakota State University. An RN Upward Mobility Program at that institution was initiated in 1978. An open curriculum pattern using a flexible process was used to adapt the baccalaureate curriculum to the special needs of RN's in three sites around the state. RN's were admitted into the basic nursing program with advanced standing based upon transfer credit and credit by examination. The faculty identified several factors contributing to the need for the study:

1. the increasing number of RN Students
2. the difficulty they reported in coping with multiple demands as homemakers, employees and students simultaneously and

3. the apparent disparity between the cirricular emphasis on professionalism and the actual role performance of many RN Students.

The Purpose of the Study

In an attempt to determine the role conceptions of RN Students in comparison to Generic Students, the study was designed to assess the variables co-existing with each of these role conceptions: bureaucratic, professional and service. The study was also formulated around the educational theory of a Power Load Margin Formula developed by Dr. Howard McClusky. The Formula enabled students to evaluate their multiple role responsibilities (Load Factors) and resources to cope with them (Power Factors). The division of the Power Factors by the Load Factors resulted in a total Margin which estimated the surplus Power available to the student for learning new role conceptions. In using such an approach, it was believed the effect of Margin on role conception could be determined. Further the study attempted to ascertain the effect of group problem-solving using a three-way rotation Nominal Group technique on Margin and role conception.

Although role theory served as the theoretical framework for the study, the Power Load Margin Formula appeared to be a meaningful way to explain variations in role conceptions between individuals and groups.

For more pragmatic purposes, this study was undertaken to provide assistance to nurse educators in meeting the unique learning needs of RN Students. Since role socialization is cited as one of the primary

educational objectives of baccalaureate programs, the results will add to the developing body of knowledge needed to help RN's succeed in adaptation to the professional role in academic settings as well as the transition back to the work setting.

The Method

The Design

A quasi-experimental pretest/posttest group design was used. Responses were obtained from four groups of students on a pretest as well as a posttest four weeks later. Responses from two Control Groups were compared with responses from two Experimental Groups. The Control Groups consisted of one group of RN Students and one group of Generic Students. The Experimental Groups of the same composition were exposed to a Treatment consisting of a modified Nominal Group technique designed to elicit maximum response from each participant while achieving group concensus. Students were divided by intact groups based upon their geographical locations. Since students were offered the opportunity to refuse to participate, total population data was unachievable. The population under study consisted of 76 self-selected volunteers from the SDSU Nursing Program.

The Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: demographic data, a scale to determine intensity of Load and Power Factors and a Nursing Role Conception Scale. The second section resulted in a Margin score

for each respondent. The Role Conception Scale was a modification of the Corwin, Kramer Scale (1965) which resulted in three potentially equal subtotals estimating the respondent's loyalty to professional, bureaucratic or service role conceptions. Content and construct validity were established through two pilot tests on over 150 nursing students in otner programs in South Dakota. Reliability coefficients for each subscale were established through test-retest procedure to be: bureaucratic scale 0.718, service scale 0.633 and professional scale 0.652. These levels are considered by researchers to be more than adequate for opinionnaires as respondents' opinions may legitmately change to some degree from one test administration to the next.

The Treatment

The treatment consisted of a three-way rotation Nominal Group technique which encouraged individual participation in gorup problem solving. The students in the Experimental Groups were asked to arrive at concensus regarding the best ways to decrease Load and increase Power, thus maximizing Margin.

The Data Collection

The pretest and treatment were administered to the Experimental Groups of RN's and Generic Students during March, 1983. The Control Groups of RN's and Generic Students were only exposed to the pretest at that time. Four weeks later, the posttest were administered to all four groups simultaneously. Participation of 90.48% was achieved as 76 of the 84 possible students completed the questionnaire sequence.

The Results

Although both Generic and RN Students scored highest on the professional role conception scale, the widest range between the means of the two groups occured on the professional scale (mean RN professional score = 26.04 of 40; mean Generic professional score = 28.53 of 40). Service role conception scores ranked second with Generic Students again outscoring RN's (mean RN service score = 24.44 of 40; mean Generic service score = 25.39 of 40). Both groups achieved the lowest scores on the bureaucratic role conception scale (mean RN bureaucratic score = 20.52 of 40; mean Generic bureaucratic score = 20.22 of 40).

RN Students experienced greater Load and Power Factors than Generic Students although their Margins were slightly lower. Supportive families were identified as key Power Factors for all students while personal goals were highlighted as major Load Factors of all students. School was viewed as a major Load factor by Generic Students while the RN's pointed to employment goals as one of their major Load Factors.

Demographic variables affecting role conception were isolated through regression analysis. Table 1 summarizes these findings. Virtually no relationship was found between Margin and professional role conception while service role conception was positively linked to Margin. RN's with two to five years of nursing experience achieved the highest bureaucratic role conception, but cumulative experience beyond five years did not increase bureaucratic loyalties. Nursing students who carried family responsibility (either RN or Generic) achieved positive

TABLE 1

Demographic Variables Affecting Role Conception

Roles	Variables Which Increase Role Conception	Variables Which Decrease Role Conception
Bureaucratic Role Conception	RN Status Age	Female Sex Unmarried Status More Children No Previous Nursing Education
Professional Role Conception	Unmarried Status Full-Time Student Status Margin	RN Status Age Female Sex More Children Full-Time Employment Nursing Experience
Service Role Conception	Nursing Education (None or Diploma) Margin	Female Sex Unmarried Status Full-Time Employment Nursing Experience

Margins. Employed students achieved lower Margins than unemployed students.

Group problem-solving had a positive affect on Margin. Professional role conception increased slightly from pretest to posttest indicating that continuous enrollment in nursing courses may affect professional values.

Discussion

Limitations

This study was limited to the intact population at one institution during the time frame of the investigation. The use of a particular process of investigation within these limitations precludes generalized conclusions to RN Students enrolled in other programs or future RN Students in this program. However, successful changes made in this RN Upward Mobility Program as a result of this study may be viewed as prototypes for other such programs.

Implications

The results of this study suggest that entering RN or Generic students should be counseled individually to identify potential Margin deficits and role conflicts so that appropriate readjustments can be made. RN's with families who wish to advance their careers should be encouraged to enter baccalaureate programs as they can succeed with positive Margins. Employment should be discouraged for full-time students as it decreases Margin. Peer group problem- solving should be

implemented early and continue throughout the program, as it was found to increase Margin. Students should be encouraged to openly discuss and resolve role conflicts which occur between clinical and academic settings. Professional values should be continually reinforced through academic models to counteract stereotypical or work-oriented role conceptions.

Conclusions

As baccalaureate programs anticipate the influx of RN Students, they must face the complex issues of their multiple role responsibilities and resultant role conflicts. Professional role re-orientation, although desireable, may be a painful process for both students and faculty. The findings of this study suggest ways in which this process may be facilitated without restructuring the entire curriculum to meet the special needs of RN Students.

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